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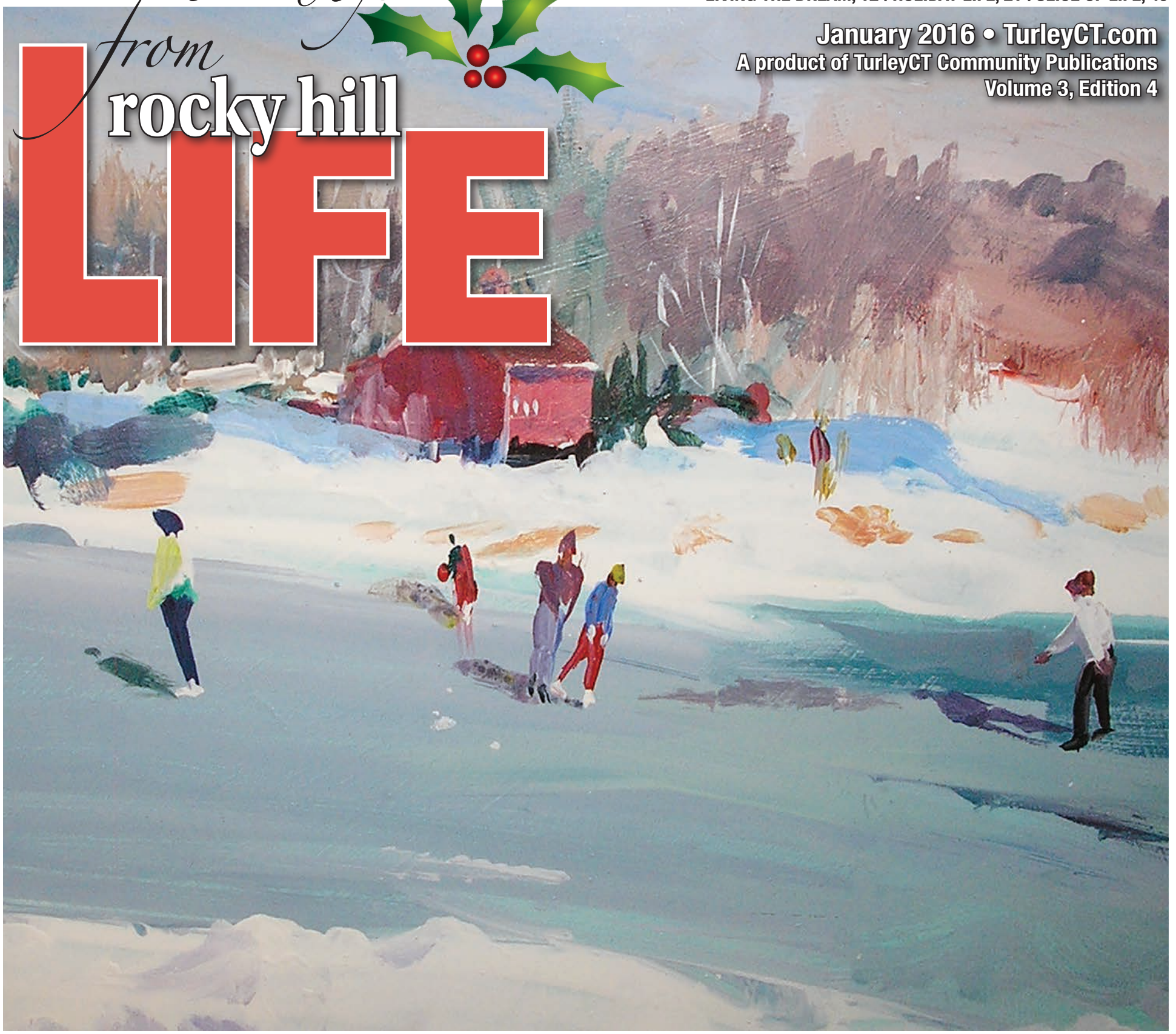
A product of TurleyCT Community Publications
Volume 3, Edition 4



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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"We've done pretty well. Since we started this program we put on 11 members and four cadets." –*Capt. James Lamarre*

See story page 6

ON THE COVER

The Skating Pond by artist Robert Noreika is this year's selection by Rocky Hill LIFE to wish our readers "Happy Holidays."

Courtesy image

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Claudia Baio takes the helm

New mayor plots a course for the next two years

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Courtesy photo

Claudia Baio was elected mayor in the Nov. 3 municipal election.

Claudia Baio expected the municipal election to be close. She was running as an outsider looking in, and that made it a challenging venture.

When the votes were counted, the Democrat won by less than 100 over Republican Henry Vasel.

"I was running against an incumbent and it was my first run for public office," she said. "Every vote really does count."

She cited the election in the shoreline town of Clinton, where the winner of the office of first selectman was decided by a single vote, as further proof of that adage.

The campaign may have been difficult, but now the real work begins.

Baio, an attorney and partner with Howard Kohn Sprague & FitzGerald, LLP, in Hartford, is using the early days of her term to gather information and become oriented to her new municipal role.

She has been involved in politics for much of her life, but this is different. She is only the second woman in town history to be elected mayor; Barbara Surwilo was the first.

Her first priority is to figure out how best to deal with overcrowding in the public schools, particularly the two elementary schools, which means she and the Town Council need to work closely with the Board of Education.

"I want to see what we can do to support our Board of Education in whatever plan they develop," she said.

While the planning is the responsibility of the board, the council plays an important role because it controls the funds that will be applied toward whatever solution is adopted.

"Another priority is trying to figure out the most appropriate way to give more space to our seniors," Baio said. "Give them what they deserve, a space to call their own."

She said she has already reworked the senior affairs committee to be structured the way it was in the past and to act as a liaison group. The goal is to make sure that senior citizens are involved in this discussion.

Baio said there are numerous things she would like to accomplish, but that two years is not a lot of time, so the above priorities were set.

"It's a balancing act. On a longer-term basis, I would like to see us have a bigger vision as to how our actions today impact tomorrow," she said.

She listed development and the municipal budget as two examples. Baio favors more mixed-use development to benefit the town's tax base. She would also like to see more done to take advantage of the riverfront.

The new mayor said the key is to seek out smart economic development as part of a larger plan, rather than take a piecemeal approach that only considers one parcel at a time. She also wants to establish better communication between residents and their local government.

"I'm trying to make sure that I'm as accessible as possible," she said.

To that end, she plans to establish regular office hours. She may also establish a monthly 'coffee with the mayor' hour at a local eatery.

Once the holidays are over, things will begin to ramp up and the annual budget process will begin. Baio's focus is on making sure that everything in that document is thought out for the long term, not just short-term solutions.

"The budget is always difficult. This year is going to be particularly difficult. We know we have an issue coming up, one way or another, with the schools."

–Mayor Claudia Baio

She does not want to do the short-term fix and then have another year with a large increase in taxes because of that. Baio knows that, no matter what she and the council do, some people will not be happy.

"The budget is always difficult. This year is going to be particularly difficult," she said. "We know we have an issue coming up, one way or another, with the schools."

The debt payments on the renovation of the high school – approved by referendum – will start coming due in the not-too-distant future, she added. She has already reached out to the schools and plans to establish a school liaison committee consisting of members of both the council and school board.

Baio quickly added she is not trying usurp the board's authority to oversee public education.

She already knows most of the municipal department heads and is pleased with the services the town provides to its residents. The mayor had particular praise for the Parks and Recreation Department.

Baio said she has gotten off to a good start with Town Manager Guy Scaife as well. Scaife was hired by the prior administration. **RHL**

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Courtesy photo

The billboard along the Rocky Hill/Cromwell town line is part of a major recruiting effort by both towns to encourage residents to become volunteer firefighters.

Help wanted

Do you have what it takes to become a volunteer firefighter?

by Mark Jahne
Editor

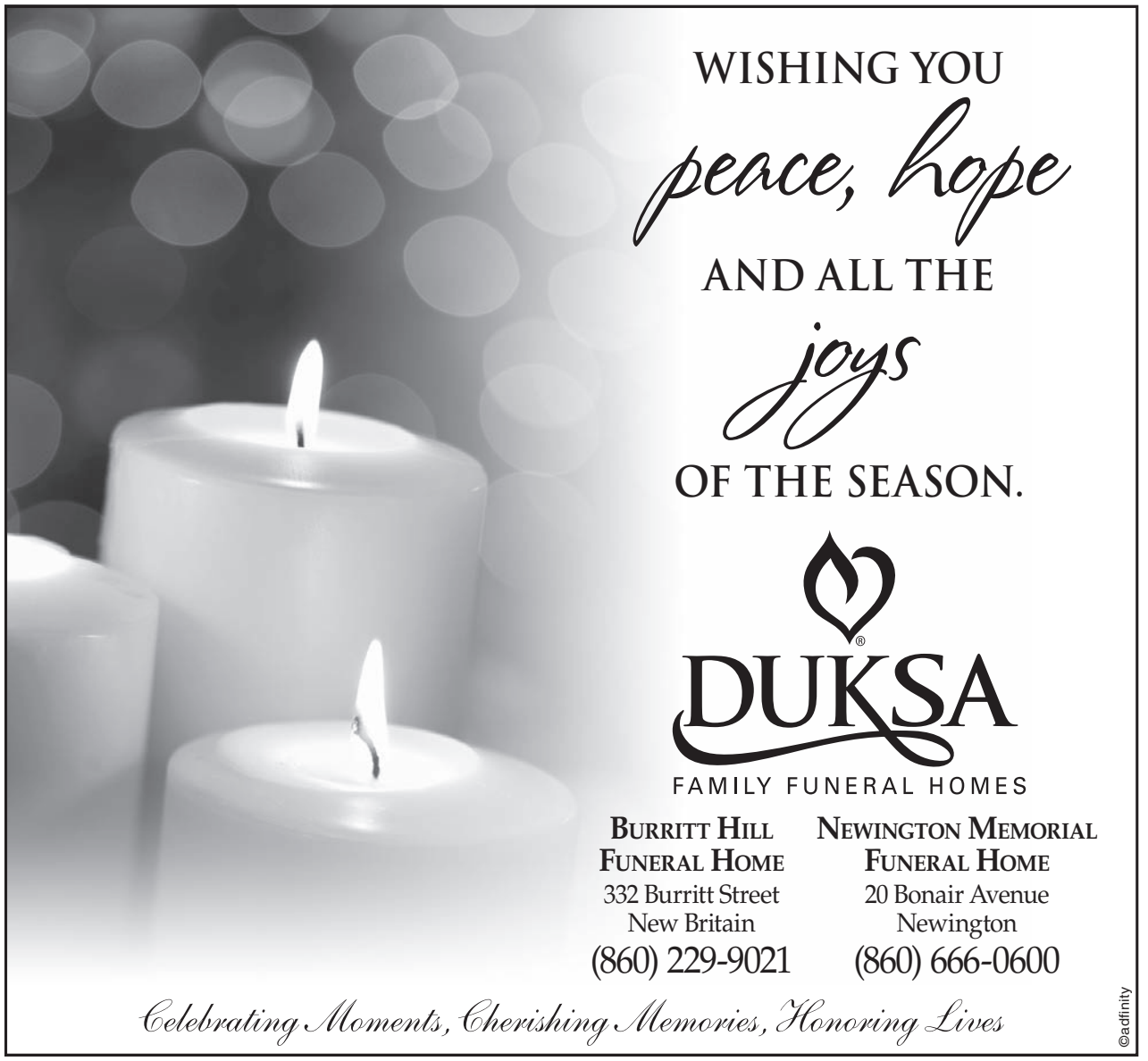
The Rocky Hill Volunteer Fire Department is looking for a few good men and women to make a commitment to serve their community.

Its leaders are using a new, focused marketing effort to attract younger members that is already paying dividends.

"This is phase two of a grant," Capt. James Lamarre, the department's recruitment officer, said.

"Phase one was a research grant and data gathering," Fred Dudek added.

Dudek is program manager for the Connecticut Fire Chiefs



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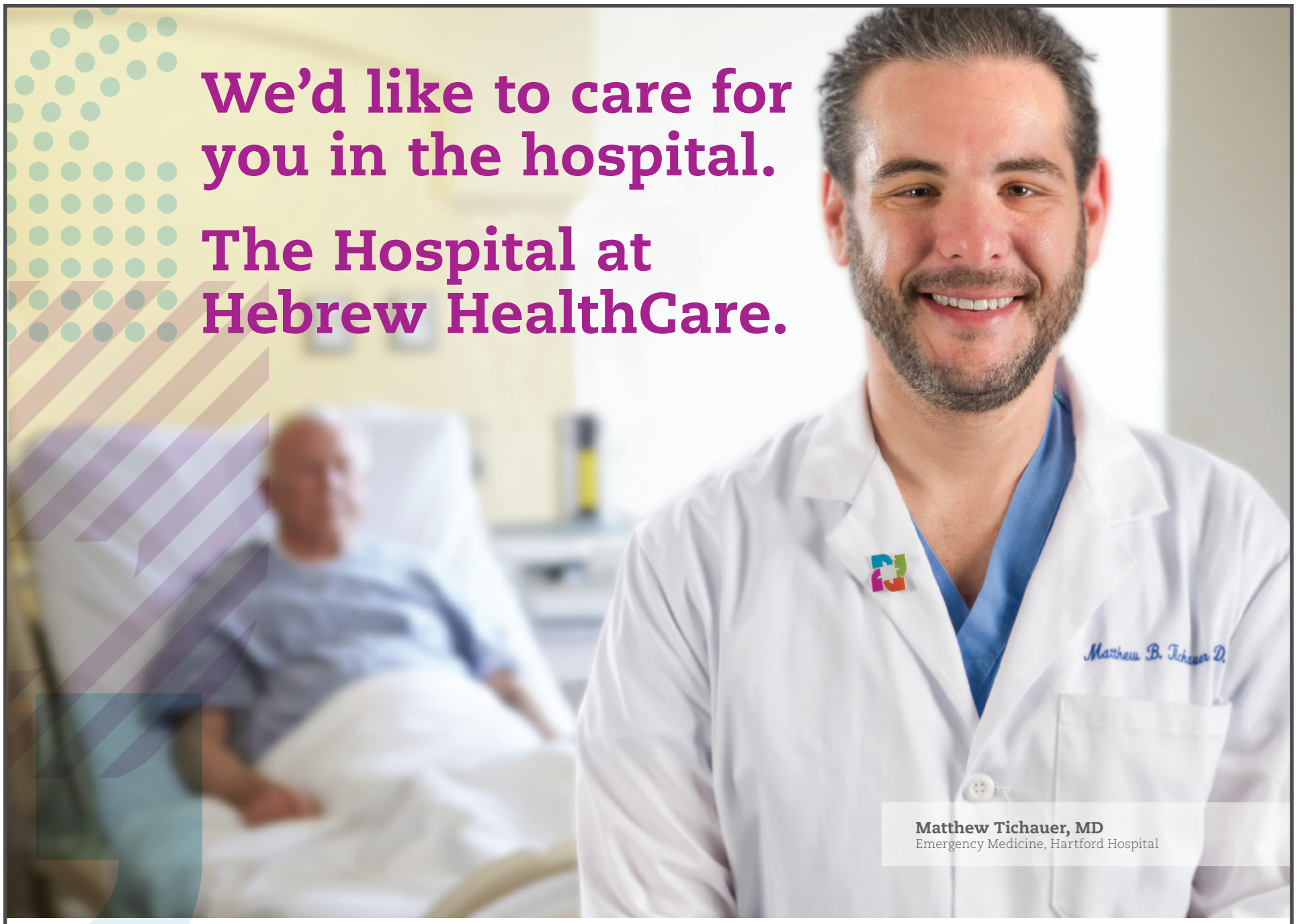

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Association and the former fire chief in Killingworth. The program is called Volunteer Workforce Solutions, and the supporting FEMA SAFER grant is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"Part of the grant is for what we call leadership training," he said.

All of the data from the initial phase was analyzed at George Mason University. Individualized results were presented to Rocky Hill and 14 other participating fire departments around the state.

Dudek described this second phase as being all about manpower.

"Over the years, the number of volunteers has dwindled," Lamarre said.

A large billboard was recently displayed on the Rocky Hill/Cromwell town line encouraging people to think about joining one of those volunteer fire departments. Lamarre explained how the Rocky Hill department is now treating recruitment as an ongoing priority throughout the year.

"We started our recruitment campaign on opening day of Little League," he said, talking to teenagers and adults at the fields. "We've done lunch periods at the high school. We've done pretty well. Since we started this program, we put on 11 members and four cadets. We want to build the cadet program up some more."

Banners were hung on the ball fields at Elm Ridge Park. Firefighters attended every public event to enhance those recruiting efforts, including Fallfest and the summer outdoor concerts. Signs were placed at town hall and local businesses.

Anyone who has reached the age of 16 can sign on as a cadet. Anyone who has reached the age of 18 can apply to become a full member and firefighter. One must either live or work in town to qualify.

Applicants must pass a physical exam as well as a State Police criminal background check. The physical exam is based upon National Fire Protection Association standards.

Those who are accepted into the department train locally first and then go for official Firefighter 1 training at the Hartford County Fire Academy, located at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks.

Training, insurance and gear are all paid for by the town. The lessons and training involved in certification as Firefighter 1 total 165 hours.

"The other thing we're concentrating on now is retention," Lamarre said. "It's brought awareness out there that we're volunteers."

He explained that the first two years as a volunteer firefighter are the busiest because of the training requirements. Once accepted, a firefighter must show up at 23 percent of all calls for service and attend at least 50 percent of the drills held every Tuesday evening.

While local firefighters are not paid a salary, they do qualify for certain municipal benefits to thank them for their service. These include a pay per call stipend and a property tax abatement of no more than $1,000.

The department boasts members who have 10, 20, 30 or more years of service, but Lamarre worries this is a trend that may disappear.

"The average volunteer firefighter stays for four or five years today. People's lives are much busier now," he said. "Last year we probably lost about five guys [for various reasons]."

The department has approximately 70 members, including

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"We've done pretty well. Since we started this program, we put on 11 members and four cadets."
–Capt. James Lamarre

command staff and fire police. More are needed, and those who are close by and available to respond to emergency calls during weekday hours are the top priority.

Dudek said one of the lessons learned from the Volunteer Workforce Solutions program and its various conferences and symposiums is that recruitment and retention must be a serious and ongoing commitment of every fire department.

He said the 15 towns participating in the program have thus far recruited 139 new members and more are pending. While there are paid departments, such as in Hartford and New Britain, Dudek said 83 percent of all firefighters in Connecticut are volunteers.

The FEMA grant runs until July 31, 2016. He said there is the possibility that the grant will be expanded to include a third phase and, if that happens, the focus will be exclusively on training.

In addition to Rocky Hill, the other participating fire departments are Broad Brook, Cromwell, Gales Ferry, Gardener Lake, Greenwich, Killingworth, Middlefield, Old Mystic, Somers, Stamford, Trumbull, Westfield (Middletown), Windsor and Wolcott. Dudek is hopeful there will be a statewide spring summit on recruiting and open houses at fire stations all across Connecticut.

"This [second] phase established the whole process for us to sustain this without outside support," James DeLaura, aide to Fire Chief Michael Garrahy, said.

He said each town got its own locally generated report from phase one. George Mason University will also analyze the phase two data and report back on those findings.

"We're appreciative of the new members who are coming in," Garrahy said.

"Our members are the most important thing," Lamarre added.

Today's volunteer firefighters do much more than extinguish flames. They are first responders in a wide variety of emergency situations. They also deal with car crashes, chemical spills, medical emergencies, storm response and a host of other challenges. According to a recruitment brochure, low personnel numbers is the leading issue facing volunteer fire departments in Connecticut.

Lamarre said each station helps with recruiting and it is especially beneficial when some of the younger members of the department speak to potential members who are in their teens and 20s.

He acknowledged that RHVFD needs to have more of a presence in the social media world if it is to attract younger members. The department does not have a Facebook page as yet, but it will be coming soon. **RHL**

To learn more, visit everydayheroct.org or rockyhillct.gov. Potential volunteers may also call fire headquarters at 860-258-7603.

Firefighters must learn how to free people from mangled cars.

Photos by Lisa Brisson

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West Side Marketplace turns 35

Grocery store started as a 5,000-square-foot operation

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Lou Romeo has seen a lot of change since opening West Side Marketplace 35 years ago.

When Lou Romeo opened West Side Marketplace 35 years ago, Rocky Hill was a different place.

"This part of town, the west part of town? All we had was Century Hills, and just the apartments. Then that area started growing," Romeo said.

"It was a nice location in a great little town. I purchased a small store – 5,000 square feet. Cold Spring Plaza was next door. It was very small."

Romeo had prior experience in the grocery industry, both wholesale and retail, in Connecticut and upstate New York.

"My background was always in the meat end of the grocery business. This was something I wanted to do; I wanted a change. It was time to sort of change directions. I used to like to change every 10 years," he said.

"Because my background was in the meat business, we grew our business with meat. We had a good reputation with deli, with prepared foods. We couldn't compete with groceries because there wasn't much groceries there [in the store]."

As it grew, West Side Marketplace added on, growing to 9,000 square feet and then expanding to 12,000.

"Then we were maxed out. It reached a point at the old store where we couldn't grow anymore. We couldn't even get deliveries out at the back door," Romeo recalled.

A nearby property became available and they purchased it, building the current 28,000-square-foot facility.

"At that point, Big Y had just opened a store. Food Mart was in the

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town and had just remodeled their store," Romeo said. "It's worked out."

The Food Mart has since become a Stop & Shop and Romeo said the landscape of the industry has changed.

"Competition is fierce. There was no Stew Leonard's. There was no Costco; there was no store like that. Walmart wasn't huge in the grocery business," he said.

"When we purchased this store, we knew our background – always perishables, quality produce, deli, meats, this is where we concentrated on."

West Side now offers catering, grab-and-go options for lunch and dinner, pizza, sandwiches, prepared foods, an olive bar and a salad bar.

"I'm surprised by the amount of foods that people buy that are grab-and-go dinners, the prepared foods we sell," said Romeo, who is semi-retired and whose son-in-law Chris Romeo now runs the business.

"Years and years ago, people would just come and they bought meat. Little by little, we began introducing prepared food they could take home and cook. Now we offer food that's all prepared," he added.

"I think we were ahead of the curve in offering prepared foods for our customers to take home and cook. Stuffed chicken breasts, stuffed filet of sole. I don't remember anybody else doing that. People are eating healthier. Our produce business has picked up drastically," he said.

Romeo has been surprised by other food trends.

"Nobody bought chicken wings. We used to throw them out, for crying out loud. Now they cost more. Once the restaurants pick up on something, people start buying. They look at recipes. That really drives the price," he said.

"The big trend now is barbecue stuff, briskets of beef, corned beef."

He's expanded his hours to compete with the other stores in the area.

"When we first opened, we were closed on Sundays. Then we started opening Sundays on a limited basis, 8 to 2. Now what's really surprising is that Sunday is the busiest day of the week and it is for everybody. It's just that there's no letup anymore, even holidays," he said.

West Side is only closed on Christmas and Easter. Another big change has come in the way people pay for their groceries.

"When they first started using credit cards, I said, 'People aren't going to use credit cards to go grocery shopping.' Now all they use is credit cards and debit cards," said Romeo.

"I have known Lou for almost 30 years. Bozzuto's has done business with Lou and his family for closer to 40 years. I have had the opportunity to watch him grow his company from a small market sandwiched inside a plaza into the full-service, free-standing market it is today," said George Motel, executive vice president of retail development with Bozzuto's, Inc., a wholesale distributor.

"Lou is genuinely a great guy. To meet him for the first time leaves you with a feeling you have known him his whole life."

Part of that involvement includes donating food to hunger relief groups and supporting a variety of local organizations.

"We've always worked with the town. We donate a lot to the food bank. Being in the food business, it breaks my heart to think there are people who are in need of food, especially children," Romeo said.

"We donate a lot to the Rocky Hill food bank and Cromwell. We do a lot with Foodshare," Romeo said.

"West Side Market has been a tremendous supporter of Foodshare since both of our beginnings many years ago. In the last 10 years alone, West Side Market has donated the food and funds to allow us to distribute over 60,000 meals," said Paula Siebers, the agency's food sourcing manager.

Romeo has won numerous awards, including business person of the year from the Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce, and was inducted into the Connecticut Food Association's Hall of Fame.

He was also named an IGA retailer of the year. He said the personal relationships have been one of the best parts of his 35 years in town.

In a business known for staff turnover, West Side has a number of long-time employees, including some who have been with the store for two decades or longer.

The store has about 120 employees. When it first opened, there were somewhere around 25.

"I did everything. I cut meat, I mopped the floors, I ran the registers. I did everything I needed to do," Romeo said. "I've seen a lot of changes in Rocky Hill." **RHL**

West Side Marketplace is located at 887 Cromwell Ave. Call 860-529-2200 or see west-side-market.com. It is open Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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Living the American Dream

Young immigrant from Poland wins national honor

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Three years ago, Rafal Wielk's life was vastly different than it is today. He lived in Poland, didn't speak any English, and didn't have national recognition in the United States for his artistic talent.

Today he is known as an award-winning sculptor, but the journey to get there was long and the path he takes from here is unclear. It was three years ago that Rafal, 19, moved from his home country to Rocky Hill, where he enrolled at Rocky Hill High School.

"They put me in two art classes the first year because I didn't speak much English and with art, you don't have to speak," he said. "I had never done any art in Poland."

From his first day in Eileen Schnyder's drawing class, it was clear that he had natural talent.

"Right away I saw he had very good observation skills and he picked up drawing skills quickly," Schnyder said. "I was shocked to learn that he had not taken art courses in Poland."

Photos courtesy of Eileen Schnyder

The final, award-winning product.

"I started one and a half weeks after school had already begun," Rafal said, recalling his first day in art class. "We started by drawing a chair. They had been drawing it for two weeks. I drew it in one day."

His interest in art rapidly began to grow as he started taking classes in painting, ceramics and sculpture. Schnyder said her student was always eager to learn more.

"As he moved through the courses in the art department, he gravitated toward 3-D works. He began taking independent study courses," she said. "His favorite statement to me was, 'What can you teach me?'"

"I remember she said to me,

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Rafal Wielk holds the Gold Key Award he won for the sculpture he created that stands alongside him.

Photos courtesy of Eileen Schnyder

'You have a talent, kid,'" Rafal recalled with a small laugh. "I just like everything."

He soon began creating more and more pieces, including a sculpture of a wolf on a cliff and a four-foot by four-foot wall sculpture that took him two months to complete.

Rafal's greatest piece to date, however, was a mosaic sculpture of a bust that was entered in the statewide Scholastic Art and Writing Awards last year.

"There were 300,000 pieces that got in at the state and I won a gold key," he said.

After earning that recognition in Connecticut, his work was put on display at the University of Hartford and was qualified for the national Scholastic competition. At this level, roughly 4,000 artists and writers entered their pieces for a total of 600 gold medals to be awarded.

Rafal won a gold medal in one of the 27 different art categories, which he said was a surprising honor.

"I'm actually the first one to win the national in Rocky Hill," he said. "Even Ms. Schnyder, she won the state, but she didn't win the national."

His sculpture will be part of a traveling art show that will spend the next two years touring all 50 states.

In early October, Rafal learned that his sculpture had earned him another award, this time from the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., which honored 29 artists and 30 writers from across the country. Though he was invited to attend a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol for this honor, Rafal was unable to attend because he was beginning a new job.

Since graduating from Rocky Hill High School in June, he has lived with his aunt and uncle and recently began working for a company that lays tiles for floors and walls. His work requires traveling to places such as Pennsylvania and New Jersey as well as all around Connecticut, leaving him little time to continue pursuing his art.

He hopes to be able to attend college in the coming years to pursue his dream of becoming an engineer, a dream that Schnyder said she is sure will come to fruition.

"His aspirations to become an engineer are on hold as he works to be able to afford to go to college," she said. "Look up the American Dream and you will see his story."

Although he has recently been given many accolades for his art, the soft-spoken teenager remains humble about his work.

"I just did what I thought in my head," he said. "No one really told me what to do. I just did what I could with what I had."

Schnyder said that it is both Rafal's raw talent and commitment to hard work that have earned him recognition and will continue to carry him into the future.

"He has a very active mind and natural curiosity paired with attention to detail and work ethic," she said.

"These qualities contributed to his success in creating a very meticulous mosaic sculpture which won national recognition in the annual Scholastic art competition."

Rafal said he is grateful for the guidance he has received from both of his high school art teachers, Schnyder and Bryan Wziontko. He hopes that with hard work, he can continue to pursue his dreams. **RHL**

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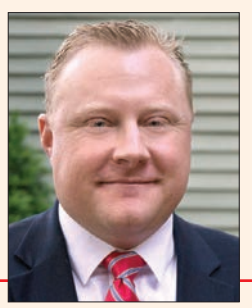

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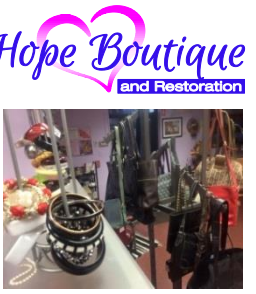

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Photo by Mark Jahne

Several professionals with expertise in various areas of small business growth and development presented a panel discussion Nov. 18 for members of the Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce.

Business development panel offers expertise to chamber of commerce

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Growing a business can be a daunting challenge, especially if it's a small business. Owners are extremely busy and often don't know where to turn for assistance.

That's one resource that members of the Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce can access as a benefit of their membership. The chamber presented a business development panel Nov. 18, hosted by Nutmeg State Federal Credit Union on Cromwell Avenue.

Areas covered included business and performance coaching, business strategy, employee benefits, succession planning, taxes and accounting, small business financing, licensing, zoning and local economic incentives.

The panel members were Joshua Blau of Principal Financial Group, town Economic Development Director Ray Carpentino, Shane Dugan of Nutmeg State Federal Credit Union, Kevin McMahon of McMahon Resource Group, Marissa Pistritto of the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Ripi Singh of Plus 4 Pi and Ric Valliere of Alpha Financial Group.

It was the first of what promises to be multiple events to benefit members and expand on what the chamber has to offer.

"We're launching the Grow Rocky Hill campaign. Our panelists will be helping businesses that hope for improvement and growth over the next year," Gina Luari, chamber executive director, said.

Each panelist gave a five-minute overview of what he or she had to offer. They emphasized the various ways they can help small businesses.

Luari said the chamber conducted an online survey, and members are looking for advice on such issues as how to deal with low or limited sales, making the sale and personnel issues. She pointed out that a large number of resources, many of them free, are available.

The chamber hopes to offer monthly seminars starting in 2016, she said. For more information about the Rocky Hill Chamber of Commerce contact Luari at 860-258-7633 or visit rhchamber.org. **RHL**

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Photo by Mara Dresner

Photographer Paul Ott shows off one of his black-and-white works.

'A moment of magic'

Paul Ott's photos capture the beauty around us

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Paul Ott is a patient man. He has to be because he does a lot of waiting.

Not for tardy friends and family, but for just the right moment to take a photo. That might mean stopping for a street to clear of traffic or for the clouds to come together in a certain way as a storm rolls in.

Ott, who calls himself "an old New Englander," has always had an artistic flair.

"When other kids were playing with baseball bats and football, I had pencils and a camera in my hands. My uncle was an artist and we would go to museums and galleries when other kids were going to baseball games," said Ott, a Meriden native who attended the Paier School of Art in Hamden (now the Paier College of Art).

"I did painting, drawing, photography, and really to this day, I still do some drawing because I find it very pleasant. I still do some painting. For time constraints, I don't do that much anymore. I do enjoy it; it's great fun. I remember all the old classical techniques."

Ott studied in numerous programs, including the Massachusetts College of Art and the Orson Welles Film School in Boston.

"I don't know that Orson Welles had anything to do with it," he said.

He lived in London for a while in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where he studied at the London Inter-Arts Center and did film and video work.

"It was absolutely wonderful," he said. "England was one of those adventure things that young people do."

He came back to the United States and taught high school art in Meriden for a while, then pursued a graduate degree at Syracuse University, where he also taught photography. He focused on media computer programming in the arts, which he called pretty useless, but fun.

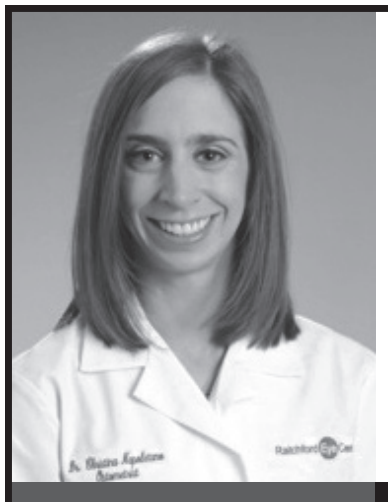
"It was the very early days of computers. We were still using tape. We would roll tape on big old computers. There were punch cards," he recalled.

Those computers were large.

"They were the size of this room. This has more power," he said, referring to his laptop.

Coming back to the area, he worked in advertising, including as an account executive and art director, as well as teaching, dishwashing and as a Realtor, even serving as president of the New Haven Association of Realtors.

"I was always pursuing my own art. I started to focus on photography,



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and in particular, work on black and white photography because I really liked forcing people to stop and look at an image, to have just that little level of abstraction, to remove the color and still have the picture to be striking and still have people look at it," he said.

"Black and white still has the power for people to stop at it a little more often or gasp at it a little more often than a color photo."

Technology has changed quite a bit through his career.

and the right contrast. It's tough to do; it's fun to do. It's less a question of the technology and more a question of the technique."

Ott sometimes shoots in black and white, and sometimes shoots in color, then converts the photos to black and white. He said that his subject matter falls into two general categories.

"There are two things that I really like to shoot. You will think they're two different things, but the way I shoot them is not really different.

"Black and white still has the power for people to stop at it a little more often or gasp at it a little more often than a color photo."

–Paul Ott

"In the old days, we had darkrooms. Today, fortunately we don't. We have digital darkrooms. That makes it much easier. The real challenge is getting it to look halfway decent," he said.

"Then, of course, the challenges of the transition from analog to digital and making the digital look like analog. It's been quite an interesting transition. The analog stuff became more and more difficult to find and more and more difficult to do."

Ott now works exclusively in digital formats.

"[You] get prints that approximate what the old analog stuff used to look like. That's really been the challenge, getting it to look like something, getting the drama in it or, in the case of some of that, the subtlety," he said.

"It's tough to do, to get the detail I enjoy, for lack of a better word, I enjoy details and I enjoy macro photography," he said.

"One of the things I really like is shooting natural things. Lately, I've been centering on flowers and plants."

He is struck by details.

"It might be plants, it might be objects. I was at a blacksmith's shop recently and I fell in love with his collection of tools. I couldn't resist photographing his tools," Ott said.

He also enjoys what he calls street photography.

"I want some of those streets to be kind of unique or have something unique going on. I almost always shoot them people-less or shoot them with people not being very important," he said, pointing to a winter scene.

"You have no idea how long I stood out there in the cold in that street scene to have no one on that damn street."

Photographer Paul Ott took this photo called "Storm" on Cape Cod as bad weather was coming in.

Another photo features railroad tracks.

"What I wanted was the railroad and the wonderful area in the background with the trees and the houses. I didn't want people, I didn't want cars. I wanted to be focused on the journey," he said.

"Paul's photography is a tremendous addition to Six Summit Gallery and Chamard Vineyards. His subject matter is an accessible mix of representational and mild abstraction," said Leo Feroleto, director of Six Summit in Ivoryton, who also is a curator for Chamard Vineyards in Clinton.

"His work appeals to both our fine art collectors and first-time buyers. Paul is a pleasure to have in our venues, both as an artist and art historian."

Ott's work was included a number of times in shows at the New Britain Museum of American Art and in hundreds of shows in the United States and Europe.

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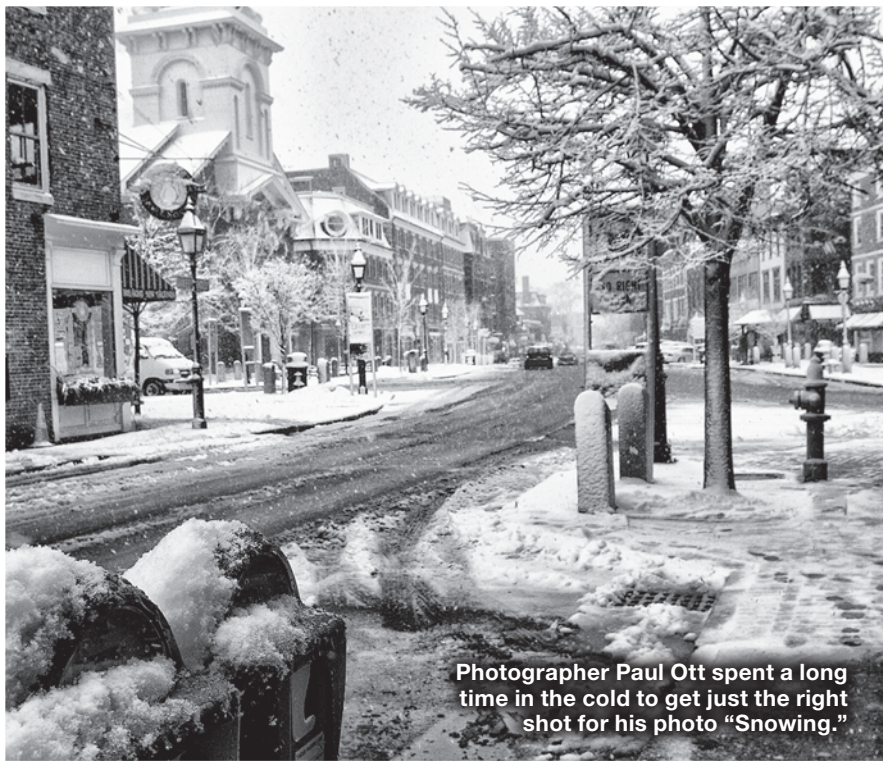


Photographer Paul Ott spent a long time in the cold to get just the right shot for his photo "Snowing."

"I'm concerned with the light and composition and the design. I want it to look like a classical print. I want it to look like an old analog print," he said.

One piece was inspired by a trip to an art gallery.

"I love that print. People are kind of upset because I included the butt in that. It's a piece of classical sculpture. It wasn't placed there to be offensive. It's a little homage to classical art. It's slightly humorous," he said.

A visit to a rooftop restaurant with friends also inspired him, even as he had to work over barriers.

"I guess if you drank too much, they didn't want you to fall," he said.

"I was looking at the street, and thinking that could be a great street scene. My friends were at dinner and kept calling me back to have a drink or [to eat] dinner. I kept going back just to shoot a reference shot."

Finding the scene is just the first part of the process.

"Then you think about what you can do with it. Can I suppress some details? Can I bring up a shadow area? I shoot it based on what the end result would be. It becomes a question of composition and design. Is the layout horizontal or is it going to be a vertical?" he said.

In some pieces, he goes in for extreme detail, while in others, such as that street scene, he wants viewers to be able to separate the different components.

"I want them to know that's a motorcycle and that's a bicycle," he said.

With his close-up work, he tries to take the viewer to a different level.

"I always try to do dramatic compositions so someone goes, 'Look at that. Look at that. Look at this.' What can I do to make this look like something other than a flower? I call it 'The Scream' because it looks like a Halloween face screaming," he said of one photo.

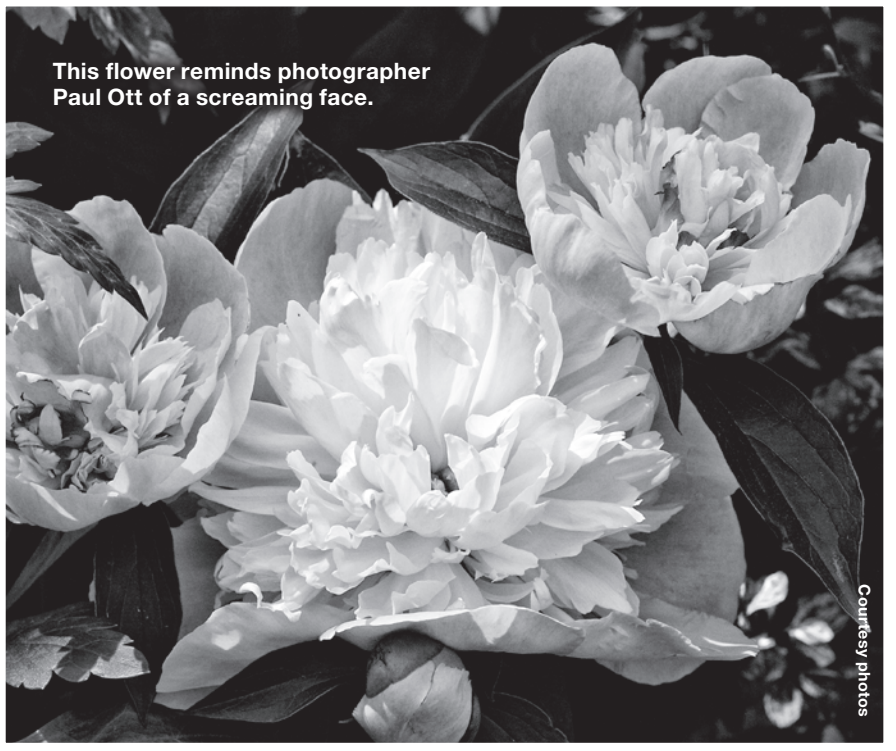
"What you try to do in a photograph is what a painter tries to do."

For Ott, it's all about connection.

"You want to find in a viewer's mind or heart how that speaks to them. In what way did it speak to you? Can you find a way to reach into the viewers' hearts and make them go, 'wow'? What else does it say to you? What does it remind you of?" he said.

"What I'm trying to get people to do is find some level of communication between them and me, where I've either touched them or excited them or amazed them or made them go 'that's nice.' That connection. If that works, that's a moment of magic. If it doesn't work, it's just a picture." **RHL**

Learn more at paulott.me.



This flower reminds photographer Paul Ott of a screaming face.

Courtesy photos

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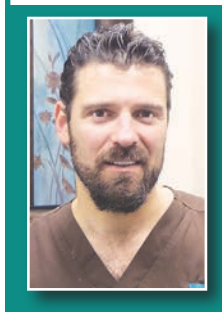

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Cadets from New Britain's Junior ROTC program presented the flags during the singing of the National Anthem.

Honoring veterans

West Hill School hosts assembly to pay tribute to local servicemen and women

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

West Hill Principal Scott Nozik fully admitted that if he were not in school that Wednesday morning around 9 a.m., he would probably just be getting out of bed and making himself a cup of coffee.

Instead, he joined his staff and students to spend the morning honoring veterans by learning about what it means to serve the country.

For the second year, the Rocky Hill Public Schools were open on Veterans Day, which both school and town officials said is a better way to honor those who served in the armed forces than taking a day off.

"It may be a bit controversial that Rocky Hill has school today, but a lot of times when people aren't working or aren't in school, they forget what the holiday is for," state Sen. Paul Doyle said.

"It's great to have young people here to learn about veterans and what it means to serve. This will set their life on course to appreciate veterans."

State Rep. Antonio Guerrera said he has been pushing to have school on Veterans Day for many years for that same reason.

"Here, kids get a true sense of what a veteran is and what they do for our country," Guerrera said. "They can go home and say to their parents,

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Photo by Allie Rivera

West Hill School Principal Scott Nozik, left, was joined for the school's Veterans Day assembly by, from left, state Rep. Antonio Guerrera, Air Force Staff Sgt. veteran Ron Catania and state Sen. Paul Doyle.

'I met a real hero today.'"

The staff at West Hill, led by Nozik, organized a school-wide assembly that included a brief presentation from the Junior ROTC at New Britain High School. The small group of students was led by Master Sgt. Remone Grooms, a Rocky Hill resident whose two daughters, Toriana and Nala, attend West Hill.

Grooms spoke about what it means to sacrifice for service and the effect that it has on both the military members and their families.

"When Toriana was born, I had to leave for another year to Iraq before I could come back and see her walk and talk," he told the students.

Grooms also explained the JROTC with help from some of the cadets, who marched into the assembly bearing both the United States and Connecticut flags for the singing of the National Anthem.

"Our mission is to motivate young people to be better citizens," Grooms said.

Following his presentation, Nozik introduced guest of honor Staff Sgt. Ron Catania, who served in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War before being disabled in the line of duty. Catania said his experience upon returning to Rocky Hill, where he has lived for 60 years, was a positive one, unlike many of his fellow veterans who returned to hostility.

"I was different than a lot of the veterans that were dishonored. I was honored when I came back," he told the crowd, thanking both Doyle and Guerrera for their commitment to veterans.

"I'm grateful for Rocky Hill and how well I'm treated as a disabled vet and that is partially due to these two men here."

Since leaving active duty, Catania has continued to find ways to serve, volunteering his efforts in New York City after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks as well as after Hurricane Katrina and the Kleen Energy explosion in Middletown five years ago.

His most recent contribution has been to the new Connecticut State Veterans Memorial in Hartford, which he began helping to plan roughly eight years ago. He said that the point of the memorial is to honor the state's 1.3 million veterans, many of whom gave their lives for their country.

Leading up to Veterans Day, students at West Hill School embarked on Operation Gratitude, an effort to collect supplies for veterans and their families.

"Some of my best friends did not come back," he said in a somber moment during the assembly.

Catania was inducted into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame in 2011.

He said that he was honored to be able to visit West Hill to speak to the students that rainy Wednesday morning and was happy to see how much thought and effort went into the program.

"It's a great thing. It actually gives me goosebumps," he said. "I think it's important to come to events like this. As kids get older, they have to understand what veterans are all about."

To thank him for his service and for visiting the school, Nozik presented Catania with a small gift bag full of West Hill School merchandise before announcing that the school has also purchased a paver stone at the new memorial.

To commemorate Veterans Day, the school also held Operation Gratitude, collecting donations of gift cards, hand and foot warmers, toothbrushes and toothpaste for veterans and their families.

Many in the school, including Catania and Assistant Principal Louise Adamow, said Nozik put a great deal of effort into ensuring that the Veterans Day assembly properly honored servicemen and women. This was not a typical assembly for the principal.

"In the schools, we're charged with educating the youth," he said. "This is important stuff. For me, this is among the most important stuff that we do."

Nozik hopes that by having students in school, children in Rocky Hill can begin to fully understand the importance of military veterans.

"We wouldn't have these freedoms if not for our veterans," he said. "This is a far better use of our day in recognizing the holiday than staying home." **RHL**

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Holidays made easy

How to maintain a festive spirit throughout the season

by Alison Jalbert and Nancy Thompson
LIFE staff

The holiday season is filled with festive imagery – sparkling snow, presents wrapped with beautiful bows, a twinkling Christmas tree adorned with ornaments and family gathered around a crackling fire sipping cocoa.

Whether or not that imagery is true to life is questionable, as the holidays often incite stress as everyone tries to attempt that ideal depicted in commercials and movies. Banish stress and chaos to the naughty list this year with tips from area experts on how to make the holidays more relaxing and enjoyable.

Wrap it up

Gift wrapping seems so simple; cover a geometrically shaped present in eye-catching wrapping paper, tie a brightly colored ribbon around it and make a jaunty bow. Easy, right? Maybe, if you're Martha Stewart. Corners end up lumpy, bows lie limp and the whole presentation looks ... off. Alison Swayne,

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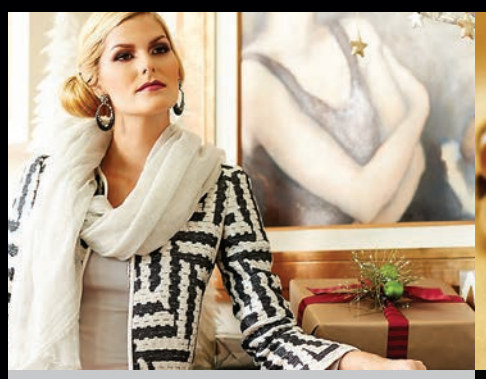

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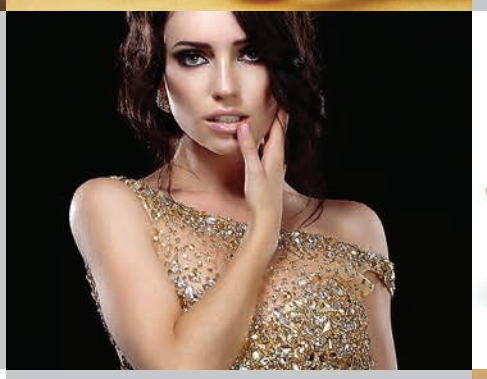

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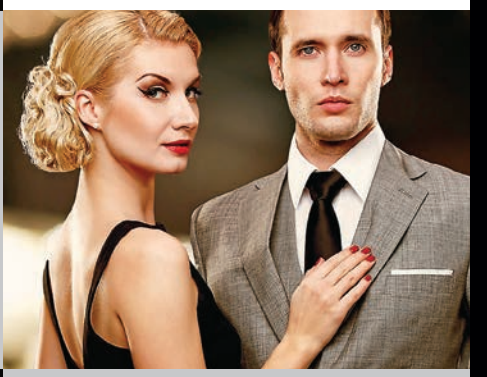

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sales associate at The Silver Dahlia in Simsbury, which also has locations in West Hartford and Glastonbury, said time is necessary.

"Realizing it will take time [is important]. Making a gift look nice is part of gift giving. It's worth it," she said.

To expedite the process, she said pre-cut paper could be helpful if many gifts are the same size, and stick-on bows can look just as pretty as handcrafted bows, with much less effort.

Purchasing quality paper is important, as it's easier to wrap with good paper as opposed to a flimsier option, according to Deb Clark, key holder at Gift-ology in Blue Back Square in West Hartford.

Leon Davidoff, co-owner of The Paper Station in Newington, said there is a secret to successful wrapping. When wrapping a package – he used a shirt box as an example – all edges of the paper need to make a crease at the edge of the box.

"That will hold it there," he explained. "When you go to do the sides, do the same thing on every single side."

For those who are truly gift wrap averse, there are gift bags available in many sizes and designs.

Jillian Skau, an associate at SPIN Monograms & Gifts in West Hartford, said gift bags are easy and reusable.

Davidoff also has a secret to proper tissue paper placement in gift bags. Taking the piece, pull down

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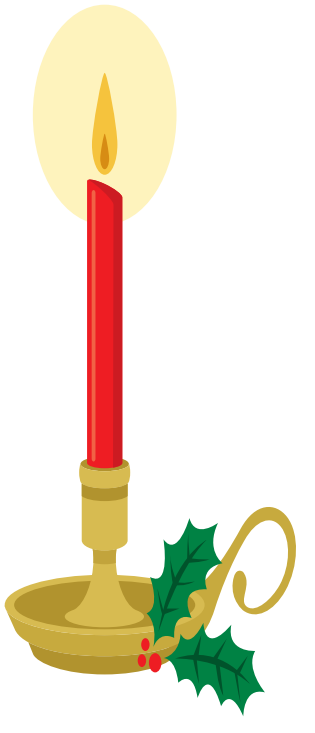

from the center, like you are making a bouquet. Doing this with two or three sheets of tissue paper will get "that poof look."

"Everyone always enjoys a properly festive gift bag," he said.

Stuff the stockings with care

What's not to like about an oversized stocking full of goodies? Emmy Lou DeBari, owner of Emmy Lou's Ltd. in Glastonbury, offered some ideas of stocking stuffers for anyone on your gift list.

Personal care items, such as hand creams made in New England and body wash and lotions, are available in small sizes that fit nicely in stockings and meet airport security requirements.

Soy candles can add a delightful scent to a home and are available in several varieties, including coconut-lime, pure lavender and vanilla. Small bottles of hand lotion in almond-pear and pomegranate scents will have hands feeling and smelling like they've been to the manicurist, and French-milled heart-shaped soaps will turn any bath or shower into a spa.

Handy gadgets are popular as well. Small light-up pillboxes are great for use in restaurants, theaters and other places with dim lighting, and a wrist key-keeper combines the look of a bracelet with the utility of never again having to search for those keys.

Armored wallets are small enough to fit easily into a purse or pocket, hold cards and cash, and protect cards from radio frequency identity theft.

One of DeBari's favorite items is an LED flashlight that's flat and fits anywhere.

Ornaments geared to a specific interest, such as bicycling, snowmobiling or sports, or an event such as a first Christmas, not only decorate a family tree, but also turn into treasured keepsakes. Holiday-themed socks in red and green with Santa, mistletoe and other designs are another option.

Not all stocking stuffers need to come from a store. DeBari also suggested adding homemade cookies or fudge to a stocking for a personal touch.

Quick ways to make your home feel festive

It's easy to spend a lot of time and money on holiday decorations. For simple and affordable ways to make a home festive, Farah Assi Evenson, owner of Interiors by Farah in Wethersfield, offered several quick and easy ideas.

First, the wreath.

"Who can say holidays without saying wreath?" Evenson said. "A lot of people associate a wreath with fall and winter, but it actually can be used any time of the year. If you start with a basic wreath you can embellish it depending on the season.

For example, dress it up with pinecones, berries and ornaments for Christmas, or flowers or seashells for summer.

Wreaths not only look good on the outside of your house, but will also look great hanging inside.

Next is the centerpiece, another decorative item that can be changed and used all year.

"For an attractive centerpiece, gather different size jars along with vases and fill them with faux greenery and berries in the winter," she said. "Just like a wreath, they complement any holiday decor. Depending on the season, you can fill them with many different things. I like to fill mine with lemons or seashells in the summer."

How about those pillows? "One of my favorite easy ways to add holiday flair is to change all the throw pillows in my house," Evenson said. "Whether it's the pillows on the living room couch or the pillows in the guest bedroom, it always makes the house look more festive. Throw pillows can go a long way and can be interchanged depending on the season. I have a few bags of them in my attic labeled for each holiday – deep reds and greens for December, blues and soft white for summer. **RHL**

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For him

Gifts available at Westfarms to say "Happy Holidays" to your favorite guy include a Lucky Brand horizontal cable shaw for $149, a Seiko Coutura watch for $495 at Lord & Taylor and the Fitbit Surge for $249 at the AT&T Experience Store.

For the kids

When shopping for the little ones, look no further than Westfarms where you will find Star Wars slippers for $46 and The North Face, Baby Girls Thermoball Bunting for $120 at Macy's and the Xbox One Bundle for $399 at The Mircosoft Store.

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From the heart

There is still time to make your own holiday gifts

by Sloan Brewster and Alicia B. Smith
LIFE staff

When getting ready to hang stockings by the chimney with care this year, why not make your own stockings?

Homemade gifts do not have to be intimidating and are a unique way to show friends and family how much you care.

Marion Carling, owner of Village Wool in Glastonbury, assured there was plenty of time to make a knitted or crocheted gift.

This year, many of her customers are coming in to make infinity scarves, towels and fingerless mittens, while a few are sticking with traditional mittens.

"There are things out there that are very simple," Carling said.

For those who have never knitted before or perhaps it's been awhile, Carling said knitting is a skill that needs to be learned.

"It's not something that you can automatically pick up," she said.

Her shop does offer a weekly-drop in knitting session Thursday evenings where newbies may be able to learn some tips and get started.

For those whose needle skills may be rusty, there are simple projects, like the aforementioned infinity scarves or a regular scarf, which Carling said is basically a long rectangle.

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Above, left: A handmade gift by Grace Epstein. She made catnip pillows with catnip that grows on the The Ethel Walker School campus. Above, right: Kemi Oluwakemi Richards, a student at Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, places her hands beside a hat she knitted as a gift.

"People who are not knitters can pick up projects like that," she said.

Carling has several customers who get busy this time of year because they are making homemade knitted gifts for their loved ones. She said hats and even Christmas stockings are popular gifts.

"I really think it's more personal," she said of the homemade option. "It just shows more thoughtfulness; you are thinking about what someone would want. Also, it's enjoyable to make. Usually, people do it because they enjoy knitting and crocheting. For them, it's a sort of creative expression, and they are able to make a nice gift for someone."

For those interested in knitting one, purling twice, but are not sure of what to make, Carling stocks several magazines in her shop that are specifically for gift making.

The Claypen in West Hartford is another great alternative for making a unique gift for a friend this holiday season. The walk-in studio carries a wide selection of gift ideas that can easily be personalized – coffee mugs, picture frames, platters and more – that guests can choose and paint for themselves.

There is no need to worry about whether or not artistic skills are in abundance; the staff can help and they also offer a number of stencils

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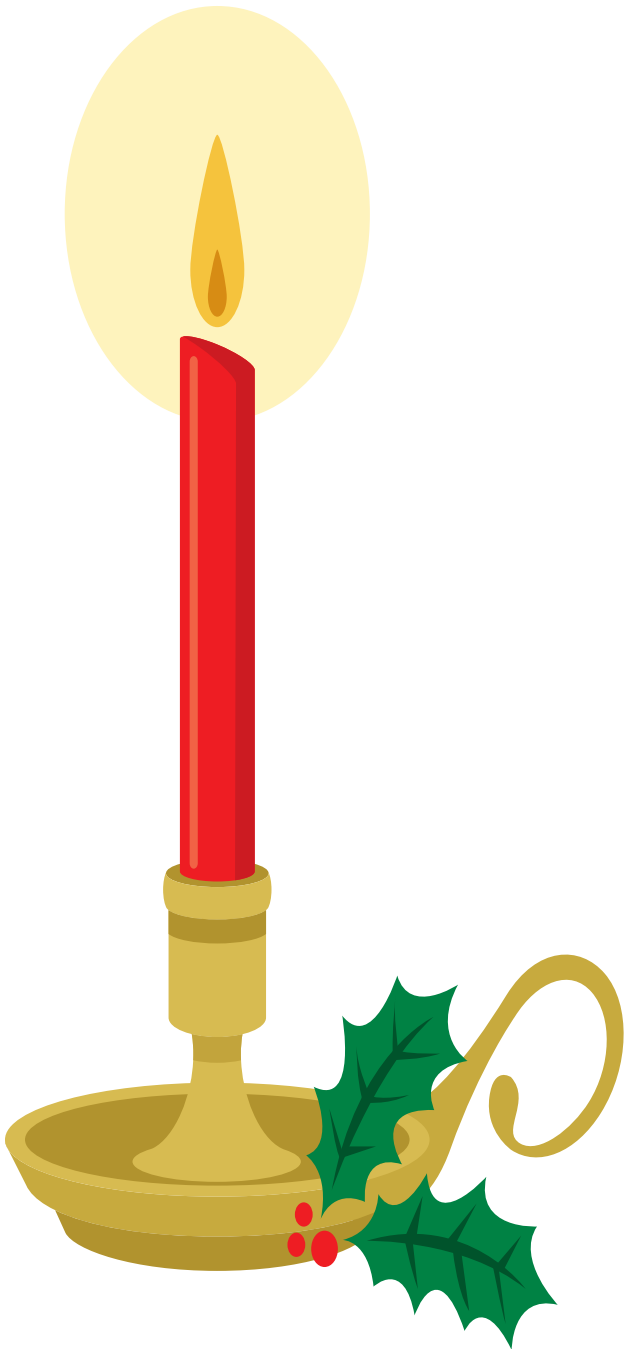

Holiday LIFE

and tape for straight lines to assist those who are less confident about free styling with a paintbrush.

In addition, patrons can try their hand at glass fusion, another creative option, where guests begin with a glass base, arrange colorful glass on top of the piece before it's put in the kiln to fuse, and later it returns to the kiln to be shaped into a bowl or any number of other items.

"This time of year is our busiest," Stephanie Yearsley, store manager, said. "People want to come in and create something useful for someone."

A popular gift item at the studio is taking handprints or footprints of children to be given as a gift for grandparents.

Yearsley said at least half of the studio customers come in to make an item for someone else.

"That is more tangible. You have to use your imagination," she said of painting an item. "We love so much being a part of people's memories and gift giving, it's true. We see people come in and really put themselves into it. It's personal. They are keepsakes; they are memories."

Christmas does not take a break for many customers of Thistle Needleworks in Wethersfield.

Owner Judi Solomon said many of her customers are in gift making mode all year long.

"There is satisfaction in putting a little love into everything you are doing – you are thinking about that person as you are making it," she said.

The shop offers a number of classes, and one of her students told her she was making a gift for her pending great-grandchild and said the project was something she could do from her hands and heart.

Among the gift items to select from are wall hangings, pillows, ornaments, Christmas stockings, bracelets and cuffs, purses and wallets, boxes, trays and mirrors.

She has been doing needlework since she was a child and assured that anyone can pick it up or take a refresher class.

Lilah Kelly, a student at Simsbury's The Ethel Walker School and a resident of Rocky Hill, prefers to make gifts.

"I don't really like buying things," she said. "I feel like I put more of myself into it when I make them. I know that sounds really cheesy, but it feels like it's more from me than from a store."

This year, she is embarking on a new project she discovered on Pinterest for her parents' gift.

"I'm making sort of like a folded book sculpture. The word 'joy' is being folded into it," she said.

With each calculated fold, she will transform the pages inside the book until the folded pages form the word.

As of Nov. 1, the endeavor, which was doubling as an art project, was not yet completed and was taking a little longer than Kelly anticipated. At that point, she had been working on it for about two months in art class and devoting about an hour to it each weekend.

Gift making projects she has completed in the past include potholders, friendship bracelets, sewn pillows and Christmas ornaments.

Grace Epstein, a Simsbury resident, art teacher at Ethel Walker and Canton Art League member, is also big on making gifts.

She especially enjoys showing up at the holidays with a basket of unwrapped handmade treasures and telling family members to choose what they like.

"It usually is something kind of fanciful," she said. "It gives them the opportunity to pick what they want."

While some of her projects are artsy, such as sculpting ceramic mugs and firing them up in her kiln or one at the school, she has also made simpler creations.

She's done knitting, making hats and such, and likes making catnip pillows, using catnip, which grows all over campus.

"It's just a simple little thing," she said. "It's a good product." **RHL**

Village Wool is located at 2279 Main St., Glastonbury. For more information, call 860-633-0898. The Claypen is at 997 Farmington Ave., West Hartford. For more information, call 860-233-3322 or visit theclaypen.com. Thistle Needleworks can be found at 506 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield. For more information, call 860-257-2718 or visit thistleneedleworks.com.

Something as simple as framing photos in handmade frames or scrapbooking memories of family and friends can be a big way to show how much you love someone this holiday season.

Eggnog completes the party

The holiday season is rife with tradition. Families reunite to exchange gifts, enjoy meals together and do a little catching up along the way. But the holiday season also is synonymous with parties.As this is a time of celebrating, it's good to remember that no party is truly complete until eggnog has been served. Impress your holiday guests with the following recipe for "Excellent Eggnog" from A.J. Rathbun's "Good Spirits" (Harvard Common Press).

Excellent Eggnog

Serves 8
8 large eggs, preferably organic
2 1/4 cups superfine sugar
8 ounces brandy
8 ounces rum
4 ounces bourbon
1 quart milk
Freshly grated nutmeg

1. Separate the egg yolks from the egg whites, setting the whites aside for a moment.

2. In a large mixing bowl, beat the yolks with a hand mixer until completely combined. Add the sugar and beat until it reaches a creamy consistency.

3. Add the brandy, rum and bourbon, then the milk, beating well.

4. In a medium-size mixing bowl, beat the egg whites with a hand mixer until soft peaks form (be sure before beating the whites that you have cleaned and thoroughly dried the beaters).

5. Fold the egg whites into the yolk-sugar-alcohol mixture. Refrigerate the mix until well chilled (at least 3 hours).

6. Stir to recombine as needed. Serve the eggnog in mugs, topping each serving with some nutmeg.

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Your thoughts:

This month we asked residents:

"What is your favorite holiday movie?"

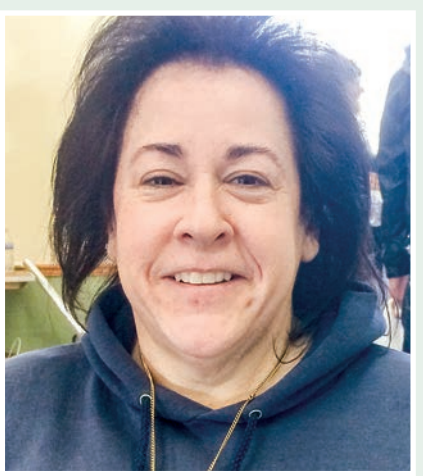
Here are some of their responses.

"Elf. I love that movie."
– Kathy Pitruzzello, shown with daughter Carly

"It's a Wonderful Life."
– Kathy Alexander, left, and Carol DeBear

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. I could watch it repeatedly."
– Gina Herboldt

"Frosty the Snowman. I still love that one."
– Nathalie Trevitazzo



"The Bishop's Wife. The original one with Carey Grant."
– Dawn Molina

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Det. Alex Gil

Police honored by MADD

Mothers Against Drunk Driving held a recognition ceremony Nov. 12 honoring its MADD Community Champions in Connecticut. The Community Service Award went to Det. Alex Gil of the Rocky Hill Police Department for his dedication, commitment and support of MADD's mission to stop drugged driving, help fight drugged driving, support victims of these violent crimes and prevent underage drinking.

Meet the author

The Rocky Hill Historical Society presents retired journalist and author David Drury at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 15 for a book signing event at the Cora J. Belden Library upon the recent release of his first published book, "Hartford in World War I." For more information contact the society at info@rhhistory.org.

Guerrera looks south

State Rep. Antonio Guerrera welcomed Ralph Thomas, Jamaica's ambassador to the United States, to discuss transportation and economic issues. Guerrera and Thomas were hosted by Connecticut Airport Authority Executive Director Kevin Dillon at the authority's offices in Bradley International Airport.

Among the items discussed were possible direct flights from Bradley to Jamaica with connecting flights to other Caribbean islands. Guerrera would like to see the Connecticut Port Authority pursue opportunities to increase cargo ship traffic with Caribbean nations.

Rotary, bank raise almost $1,000

The Wethersfield/Rocky Hill Rotary Club raised $997 as part of the annual Liberty Bank/Rotary Club Thanksgiving Dinner Drive. The club and the Liberty Bank branches in Wethersfield raised $798 and received matching funds of $199 from the Liberty Bank Foundation, for a total of $997.

These funds were donated to Rocky Hill Human Services and Wethersfield Youth & Social Services.

Thirty-four Rotary clubs and the East Haddam Lions Club teamed up with the 48 Liberty Bank offices to raise $213,965 during the weeks after Columbus Day. At the end of the drive, the Liberty Bank Foundation added 25 cents for each dollar raised, resulting in a grand total of $267,456.

Help Atrium help seniors

The Atrium at Rocky Hill is holding a "Stockings for Seniors" drive this holiday season. Pick up a stocking at the memory care facility at 1160 Elm St. Ext. and fill it with small items for donation to a local senior citizen in need.

Stockings will be distributed through local senior centers and meals on wheels programs. This collection will run until Dec. 15. For additional information call 860-563-5588. **RHL**

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Photos by Mark Jahne

Carlie

Carlie is a gentle and loving feline who is 4 years old. A domestic middle hair with tiger and white markings, she prefers older children and teenagers and can cope with other animals in the home, as long as they are calm.

Ray

Ray is a 1-year-old male hound mix. He would fare best in a single-family home or condominium. Ray does not like cats and has no prior experience living with other dogs. He is sweet and friendly but also has a lot of energy and needs daily exercise. A family with prior general dog experience is the best fit for him. Obedience training is required as part of Ray's adoption plan.

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Students of the month

Pair of GMS students are CAPSS Superintendent Award winners

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

When Milan Patlikh and Nichole Detushev set their mind to something, they make sure to accomplish it. For that reason, among others, the two students are the recipients of this year's CAPSS Superintendent Award at Griswold Middle School.

The honor is given by the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents to two eighth grade students, one boy and one girl, who demonstrate academic excellence, leadership and character. They were nominated by the team of teachers who work with them each day.

"Milan is a model student. He will always be open and willing to work with anybody, and that's very mature for an eighth grade student," social studies teacher Karla Harding said.

"I can't say enough positive words. He's everything you'd want in a perfect student."

Nichole's teachers had similar praise to offer about her.

"She's inquisitive, she's interested, she's involved, she's extremely diligent. She sets a very high standard for herself," science teacher Amy Hall said. "Nichole has a confidence that is unique to someone her age."

Milan enjoys all of his classes, but he considers science to be his favorite.

"We're learning about clouds and air masses," he said.

The 13-year-old is also an accomplished athlete. He will soon begin playing on the Unified Sports basketball team that pairs students who have disabilities with their typical peers.

"I like helping people that need extra help," he said. "Also I feel like sometimes I'm learning from them."

Milan Patlikh, left, and Nichole Detushev are 13-year-old eighth-graders who were selected to receive the CAPSS Superintendent Award at Griswold Middle School. The state award recognizes two students who demonstrate academic excellence, leadership and character.

Milan recently finished his first season on the school's soccer team.

"My friends just said 'you should try out,' so I did," he said.

Outside of school, he works to stay just as active. He attends the Champions Karate School in Cromwell and has been practicing karate since the age of 4. Now, in addition to continuing his own learning, he works as a karate teacher at the school.

"Teaching is my favorite part," he said. "When someone gets something they've been trying to do, it puts a smile on my face."

Milan began teaching karate to children ages 4-6 when he was 8. Now he teaches a wide range of students between the ages of 4 and 60.

"It's mostly younger people, but there are some older ones, too," he said. "I want to keep teaching."

He is also a former gymnast who still hones his skills by taking a tumbling class in Plantsville once a week.

"I used to do gymnastics, but now my schedule is too busy, so I do this once a week and get to do flips

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for fun," he said.

Outside of school and extracurricular activities, Milan enjoys travelling with his parents and older sister Shivani, 18. The family has seen such places as Hawaii, South Africa, Italy and England.

"Hawaii was my favorite," he said. "My dream destination, though, is Iceland."

He has typically only travelled with his family, but Milan is hoping to expand his horizons this upcoming summer with the Travel for Teens program.

"They have trips that are between 10 days to a month and they go everywhere," he said.

He is unsure where he would go, or for how long.

"I really want to travel more in the future."

Learning about foreign lands is common for Nichole, who is fluent in both English and Russian. Her father is from Ukraine and her mother is from Belarus, so Russian is the primary language spoken in their home.

"Russian culture is very important," the 13-year-old said. "There are a ton of Russian holidays that we celebrate."

Nichole and her family attend a Russian church in Hartford each week and keep up with Russian traditions, including a large celebration for Russian New Year.

"There's a tradition that somebody dresses up as Santa and you have to do tricks for presents," Nichole said. "I'll usually dance, or I used to play the violin."

Those celebrations are not the only time that she can be found dancing. A competitive dancer for the past eight years, she is typically at dance rehearsal five or six times per week.

She is taking classes in ballet and tap, the latter of which is her favorite, but in the past she has learned a wide variety of styles.

"I've done pretty much every style of dance – ballroom, hip hop, lyrical. I used to do gymnastics, too, and it helped me with dance."

Although she loves dancing, Nichole makes it clear that it is not her first priority.

"School always comes first, but dance is something I'll always do in my free time."

Her dedication to her studies has been noticed by her teachers, who said in their nomination letter that Nichole aims to earn 90 or above in all classes so that she can get into Quinnipiac University.

"I'm a big fanatic about grades," Nichole said. "It's important to try to keep your grades up because it'll get you far in life. The harder you work, the more you can achieve."

Nichole's hard work in school not only extends to her studies, but to her commitment to the school's morning announcements. Nichole served as an announcer in sixth grade but quickly began moving up the ranks.

"I saw all the crew and asked if I could be more involved," she said. "Now I help to run everything. It's hard, but it's fun."

Both students find it important to dedicate their time and efforts to whatever they are doing, be it studies, sports or school clubs. Milan and Nichole will be recognized at the January Board of Education meeting for their accomplishments. **RHL**

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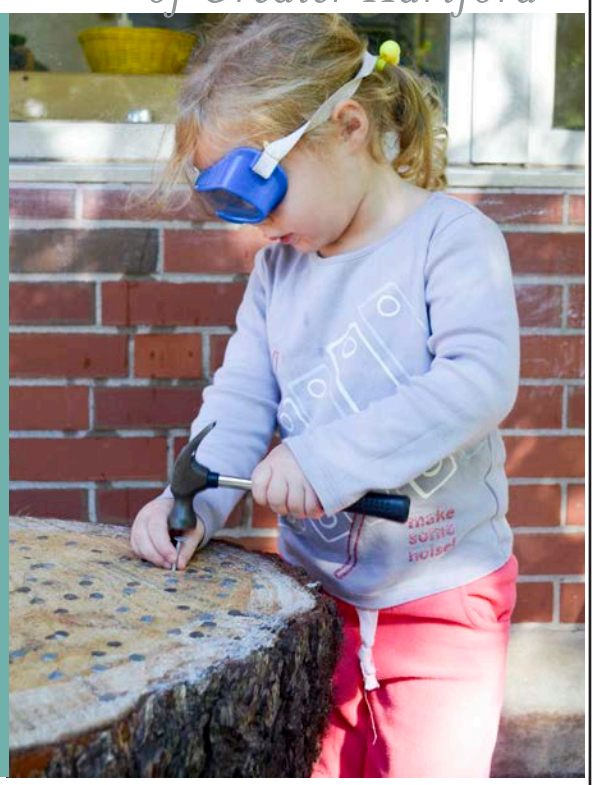

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LIFE in the classroom

Griswold Middle School Fun Run benefits a cause

Photos by Allie Rivera

Eighth grade students look at an army Jeep parked at the finish line for the Fun Run as a reminder for what the event was all about. They are, back from left, Vikram Chowdhury, Robert Degree and Ohm Ghutadaria; front from left, Matt Durkin, Tyler Hussey and Jeremy Walker.

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

The weather may have delayed their plans, but rain could not stop the students and staff at Griswold Middle School from completing their Veterans Day Fun Run.

Initially planned for the Nov. 11 morning of Veterans Day, the event was pushed back to Nov. 13 due to inclement weather, but the sentiment still remained.

"It was really used as a fundraiser for the Wounded Warrior Project," eighth grade social studies teacher Karla Harding said. "It came about during a staff meeting where we were discussing how we can teach them what Veterans Day is about in today's world."

Social studies teachers in all grades teamed up to prepare lesson plans leading up to the holiday to teach students its history and Griswold Middle School military veterans in society today.

Many of the lessons included emotional videos that Harding and the other teachers were able to find online. She said that student response was extremely positive.

"Students have been very moved by it," Harding said. "I think it made them understand more about what it means to be a veteran."

"We went through a lot of Kleenex," sixth grade social studies teacher Brian Jacobson added with a small laugh.

In addition to learning about veterans in their classes, students were asked if they wanted to participate in a Fun Run through Elm Ridge Park. The run was entirely voluntary, but each participating student was asked to bring in at least $1 to donate to the Wounded Warrior Project.

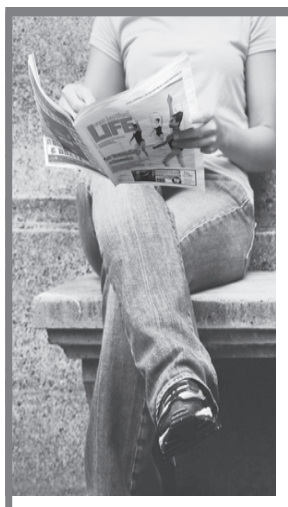
The school raised more than $1,400 for that charitable cause and roughly 95 percent of the student population participated.

"I was impressed because we only required them to bring in a dollar, but so many came in with 10s and 20s," Jacobson said.

"After we did the lessons and kids learned more, we got a lot more coming in," Harding added.

The Wounded Warrior Project is a national organization that honors and empower wounded soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines through awareness and funding for unique and direct programs.

This year was the second year that Rocky Hill Public Schools held classes on Veterans Day and administrators wanted to use the time to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Eighth grade runners chose to show their national pride in red, white and blue for the Fun Run. They are, from left, Alyssa Nicsyn, 14, Bella Herrick, 13, Gabrielle Danbour, 13, Athea Bonamico, 13, Julia Rizzo, 13 and Daria Kokic, 13.

properly honor those who serve or served.

"We wanted to do something different for Veterans Day. We wanted to make sure that the kids had some exposure to what Veterans Day is all about," Principal Rick Watson said.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't be out here on Wednesday because of the weather, but today's a perfect day for it."

Students who participated and helped to raise funds walked from school to the park with the rest of the volunteers in their grade, with assistance from local police officers. They gathered by the pavilion and listened to a group from the school's chorus sing "America the Beautiful" and a presentation from Watson.

"We wanted to do something different for Veterans Day. We wanted to make sure that the kids had some exposure to what Veterans Day is all about."
– Rick Watson

"Let's remember why we're here today," he told the crowd. "We're here in honor of those veterans who fought for us and allowed us to have the country that we have today."

A one-mile loop through the park was formed, with teachers stationed throughout the course to guide students in the right direction for their two-mile run/walk. While some chose to run and others chose to walk, everyone knew why they were there.

"It's a good way to get out and have some fun, but it's also for a good reason," eighth-grader Nicole Zarrilli, 13, said.

"It's good to know that you're doing it for someone who has had a hard time. We finally get to do something for them after they, over the years, have done so much for us."

"It's a fun thing to do with friends for a good cause," 12-year-old Fiona Bruzik added.

Harding considered the day a success and is grateful for the support that came from the school, students and community to make the Fun Run happen.

"This was a whole school effort," she said. "A lot of people went into making this happen." **RHL**

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Slice of LIFE

photos by Allie Rivera

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7

Holiday Fair

St. James Church held its annual Holiday Fair Nov. 21. The event, which has become a church tradition over the past seven years, featured 22 vendors, raffle items, food and a cookie walk. 1. Kara Hallisey of Celebration Stemware offered festive hand-painted wine and champagne glasses. **2.** The Beadazzled booth, owned and operated by Kathy Haggerty, offered sparkling necklaces and earrings. **3.** Lucille Deschenes, owner of The Owl's Nest, was surrounded by her cozy creations. **4.** Gail Grant, a representative from Longaverger, greeted people while displaying her merchandise. **5.** Carly Pitruzzello, owner and designer of Remarkable Scents, makes her own handmade soaps and jewelry. **6.** The fair had something to offer people of all ages, including 12-year-olds Taylor Glover, left, Kyle Glover, center, and Chris Drisdelle. **7.** Ron Andrea, Paul Flannery and Bob Ouellette, from left, chatted with visitors while selling raffle tickets.

Quiet vigilance

Volunteer trail managers make sure town parks are at their best

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Volunteer trail managers,from left, Bob Ludwig, Sandi Kelly and Ed Chiucarello were honored by the Town Council for their efforts to keep the town's parks and hiking trails in top condition.

Photo by Mark Jahne

They quietly go about their duties, seeking no attention or gratitude. The only appreciation they need is to see their fellow residents enjoying the town's numerous parks and trails.

Ed Chiucarello, Sandi Kelly and Robert Ludwig are volunteers who assist the town Parks and Recreation Department by serving as managers of the parks that also have hiking trails: Bulkley, Dividend and Quarry. They make sure the paths are clear of debris and tend to any needs that may arise.

They also advocate for improvements such as bridges, fences, stone steps, signs, information kiosks and more. They make frequent visits to the parks, removing litter and clearing the trails of natural debris.

"If it wasn't for these three, we would never be where we are with our trail system," said Lisa Zerio, director of parks and recreation. "They're also our eyes and ears out there."

She praised what she called the countless hours devoted by this trio and added that they are a huge help to her staff. Town crews handle major issues, such as fallen trees.

The trail managers were publicly honored during a meeting of the Town Council. Zerio spoke on their behalf.

"I'm not sure the general public knows how valuable these residents are," she said. "Our three volunteers are in there and organizing clean-ups."

Ludwig has led two school groups on park hikes. Zerio credited Kelly with helping secure a state parks grant that enabled the town to make several improvements at Dividend Park, such as stone steps and an information kiosk.

"These guys are our eyes and ears out there. The town is really blessed."

– Lisa Zerio

All three work with Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. They assist boys who select one of the parks for their Eagle Scout project and are liaisons to town staff.

"The park department can get out there and maintain the trails. These three are who make the parks so beautiful," Zerio said. "The town is really blessed."

All three serve as trail leaders in the local parks when the Connecticut Forest & Park Association conducts its annual statewide Trails Day.

"We work behind the scenes. We do what we see needs doing. The better it looks, the more you want to work at it," Kelly said. "I love the land. We'd rather be hiking in the woods any given weekend."

Ludwig said he has been working on the parks for "a very long time," before Quarry Park was established.

"I enjoy doing it. I have a long history of undertaking these things. We enjoy walking in the woods," he said.

"I like to be in the woods. It's like my own back yard. Quarry Park is right across the street from my house," Chiucarello said. **RHL**

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Mirella, Mary Anne, Joan, Dan, Cynthia and Karen

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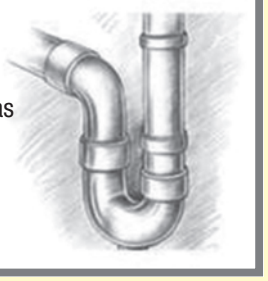

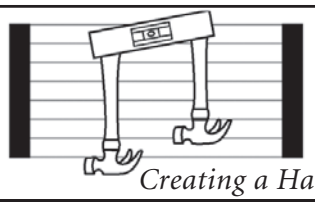

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Editorial

What will the new year bring?

It's hard to believe that Christmas, Hanukkah and the new year are already upon us. Didn't we just celebrate those holidays a few months ago?

Time flies along unless, of course, one is waiting for an airplane, train, high-priority package or check to arrive. Then it drags on as if running in quicksand.

As the holidays approach, they bring with them joy and hope for better times. Everyone looks at the arrival of Jan. 1 as an opportunity to refresh their outlook, make resolutions to improve their lives and hope – maybe even pray – that whatever difficulties befell them this year will not return.

The economy is creeping upward, but it has a long way to go to catch up to the pre-recession days of 2006. Too many people are still looking for work without any luck.

Municipal leaders enter the new year wondering how they will be able to hold the line on taxes without cutting deeply into programs and services that residents want and need. They certainly can't expect any help from state government, not when it is facing an overwhelming budget deficit.

Just how did that happen, anyway? There was a time when the state got by just fine with the money it had. Then, the lottery was created, but over time that extra revenue wasn't enough.

Along came Indian gaming, a huge boost to state coffers. That wasn't enough, either. So, a personal state income tax was passed. Surely that would provide more than enough money to fund everything that needed funding.

Guess again. All it did was give state lawmakers more money to play with and they spent it all – and then some. That's something we all may want to remember when they run for new terms in November 2016.

Speaking of elections, next November will finally mark the end of a presidential campaign that has already dragged on much too long.

Will Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton remain the front-runners of the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively? A lot can change between now and November.

But let's not get caught up in political angst. It is the holiday season, after all, a time of love and brotherhood and good cheer that everyone can enjoy regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or any other defining characteristic.

Let's focus on that and enjoy all the season has to offer. We wish all of our readers and advertisers a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and prosperous new year.

#rockyhilllife
@turleyct

Snap a photo around town, share it on Instagram, and you might see it in these pages.

January *calendar*

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

2 **Make a Mitten,** 10:30 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also 12:30 p.m. Jan. 3 and 10:30 a.m. Jan. 4

5 **Knitting Group,** 11 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, alsoJan. 19 and 26

Downton Abbey Fashions & Social Change, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

CT Hearing Voices Network support group, 7 p.m., Rocky Hill Congregational Church, 805-817 Old Main St., second floor classroom, also Jan. 12, 19 and 26

6 **Playgroup Plus,** 10:15 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, alsoJan. 13, 20 and 27

Minecraft Club for Grades 6-12, 5:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also Jan. 13, 20 and 27

Preschool Expo, 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

Mystery Book Discussion, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

7 **La Leche League,** 10 a.m. to noon, 23 Textbook Ave., 860-529-2307 or mgubala@sbcglobal.net

ESL Classes, 10:30 a.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info, also Jan. 14, 21 and 28

13 **Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group,** 6 p.m., The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., 860-563-5588 or ehall@benchmarkquality.com

Learn 3D Design Crash Course, 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

16 **Alzheimer's or Dementia Caregivers Support Group,** 2 p.m., The Atrium at Rocky Hill, 1160 Elm St., 860-563-5588 or ehall@benchmarkquality.com

19 **Read with Toby the certified therapy dog,** 4 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

Getting Started with Streaming TV, 6:30 p.m., registration required, Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

20 **Teen Anime Club,** 6:30 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

26 **Webster Estates,** 6 p.m., Cora J. Belden Library, 33 Church St., 860-258-7623 or rockyhilllibrary.info

Is your club, community organization, school or house of worship holding an event open to the general public? If so, please send us the details for inclusion in our calendar. Email your events to Mark Jahne at mjahne@turleyct.com or mail them to Turley CT Community Publications, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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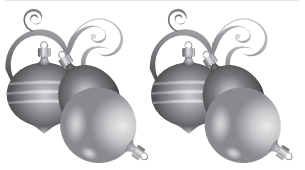

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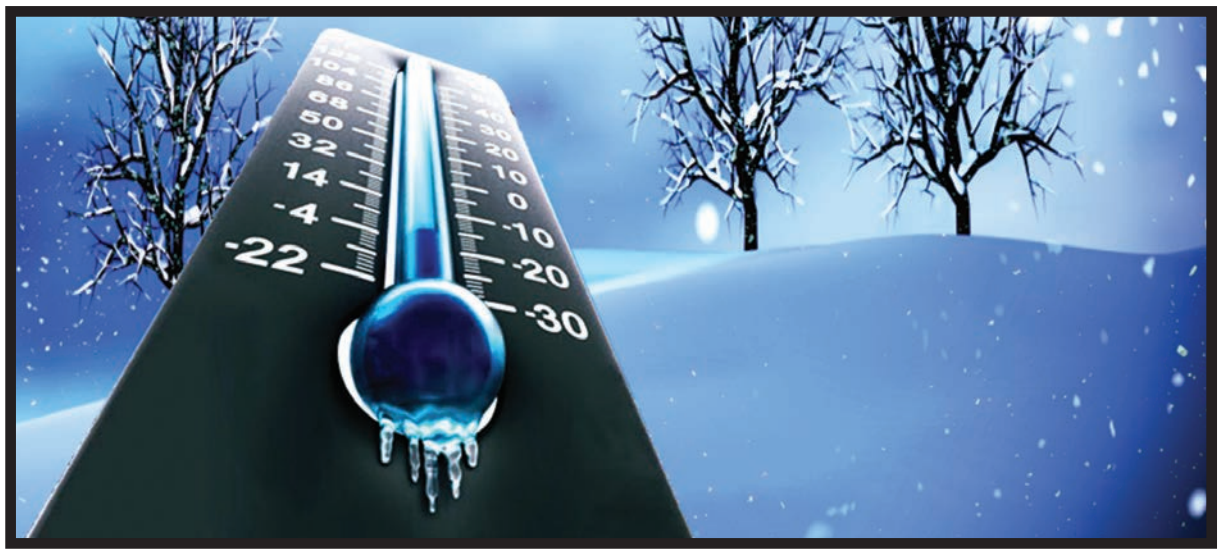

Averages, and Extremes...

Climatologically speaking, January is the coldest month on record here in Connecticut. However, last year, it was February that made headlines – not only the coldest February since records have been kept, but the coldest of all months!

No matter if it's hot, or cold... dry, or wet...we're always crunching numbers. It's important to know how the weather we are dealing with compares to the past. It helps us make correlations and to track trends over time.

The term normal can be somewhat misleading, "average" is more appropriate in many cases. When talking about temperatures being "above" or "below" or even when it comes to rain/snow with a "surplus" or "deficit" ...the values we are using as points of reference are based on a mathematical average over a 30 year timespan, typically three consecutive decades.

So, specifically for the month of January... how does the month shape up? On the 1st, the average low is 19 while the average high is 35. By the end of the month, there is not much fluctuation... 18 and 35, respectively. For snow, 12.3 inches is average.

In the realm of extremes, January of 2011 holds the record for snowiest with 54.3 inches. The coldest temperature recorded in the month was 26 degrees below zero, in 1961! On the flipside, the warmest temperature recorded in the 31 day period was 72, in 2007. **RHL**

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